

Blogging for Change

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For regularly updated resources and discussion of blogging and participatory media tools, visit my blog at: www.Rconversation.com.

WHAT IS A BLOG?

**Definition by the online peer-produced encyclopedia, Wikipedia.
(visit: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blog> for more detailed explanation of blog features, plus relevant links)**

"A weblog, or simply a blog, is a web application which contains periodic, reverse chronologically ordered posts on a common webpage. Such a Web site would typically be accessible to any Internet user. Part of the reason "blog" was coined and commonly accepted into use is the fact that in saying "blog," confusion with server log is avoided.

Blogs run from individual diaries to arms of political campaigns, media programs and corporations, and from one occasional author to having large communities of writers. The totality of weblogs or blog-related webs is usually called the blogosphere.

The format of weblogs varies, from simple bullet lists of hyperlinks, to article summaries with user-provided comments and ratings. Individual weblog entries are almost always date and time-stamped, with the newest post at the top of the page. Because links are so important to weblogs, most blogs have a way of archiving older entries and generating a static address for individual entries; this static link is referred to as a permalink. The latest headlines, with hyperlinks and summaries, are offered in weblogs in the RSS XML-format, to be read with a RSS feedreader.

A weblog is often run through a content management system or CMS."

EXAMPLES OF ACTIVIST/NON-PROFIT BLOGS:

Info-Commons blog at <http://www.info-commons.org/blog>

The screenshot shows the Info-Commons blog homepage. At the top, there's a banner featuring the 'information commons' logo (two circles with 'i' and 'c') and a collage of various images including a classical statue, musical notation, and the American flag. Below the banner, the text 'info-commons.org: an online publication advocating access to ideas' is visible. The main content area has a red header bar with the text 'commons-blog'. A sidebar on the right contains links for 'XML', 'CALENDAR' (showing November 2004), 'ABOUT' (describing the site as an American Library Association-sponsored site), and 'CONTACT' (listing the editor's name and email). The bottom of the page shows a Windows taskbar with icons for Start, Internet Explorer, and other applications.

Public Knowledge blog at www.publicknowledge.org

The screenshot shows the Public Knowledge blog homepage. At the top, there's a banner with the 'Public Knowledge' logo and a portrait of a woman. Below the banner, a navigation menu includes 'Home', 'About', 'Issues', 'News & Analysis', 'Resources', and 'Press Room'. The main content area features several sections: 'Take Action' (with a link to the 'Fax Brigade'), 'Hot Issues' (mentioning 'MPAA v. Alleged File Traders' and 'The Intellectual Property Protection Act'), and 'Breaking News' (mentioning 'Music sharing that's free and legal'). On the right side, there are 'Resource Rooms' (links to 'Policymakers', 'Artists', and 'Press'), 'Essentials' (links to 'Why these issues matter', 'What is copyright?', and 'What is the public domain?'), 'Hot Issues' (links to 'MPAA v. Alleged File Traders' and 'The Intellectual Property Protection Act'), and 'Upcoming Events' (link to 'Gigi B. Sohn at Communications Law 2004'). The bottom of the page shows a Windows taskbar with icons for Start, Internet Explorer, and other applications.

Desertlight Journal (on domestic violence awareness) at:
<http://desertlightjournal.blog-city.com/>

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL <http://weblogs.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?zi=1>. The page title is "DESERTLIGHT JOURNAL". The main content area displays a blog post titled "Domestic Violence Resources for the Whole Community" from the "DVA2004 Media Recon Project". The post discusses resources for men and women affected by domestic violence. On the left sidebar, there's a "FULL AWARENESS RESOURCES" section listing various organizations like AMEN Ireland, Domestic Abuse Helpline, Facts About Family Violence, Family of Men Canada, Friends to the End, FYTEA, GMWP, The Men's Center, Mensight Magazine, MenWeb, Shattered Men, The Truth About Family Violence, Stop Abuse For Everyone, STOP THE VIOLENCE INC., and VIP/SAFE-NH. Another sidebar on the right lists "INFORMATION" categories such as How the Project Works, FAQ, Using Statistics, Questions, History, Resources, Our Statistics, The Background, What I've Learned so Far..., Wikipedia on DV, Articles of Interest, Urban Legends Debunked, Super Bowl Legend, Rule of Thumb Hoax, Manufacturing Statistics, and How to Get the Word Out. The author of the post is ERIN PIZZEY, and it includes links to Published Works, In the Spotlight, Background Info, and Prone to Violence.

Examples of other blogs:

political blogs:

Instapundit – leans Republican. (300,000 readers per day) www.Instapundit.com
Daily Kos – very liberal Democrat (800,000 per day) www.dailycos.com

"Milblogs": GI's blogging from the field:

Sargeant Hook: <http://www.sgthook.com/>

Mudville Gazette: <http://www.mudvillegazette.com/>

General blogs by "influential" people who have been blogging for years:

Joi Ito: <http://joi.ito.com>

Dave Winer: www.scripting.com

International blogs:

"Healing Iraq" by an opinionated Iraqi dentist <http://healingiraq.blogspot.com/>

"Hoder" the Iranian dissident blogger: <http://hoder.com/weblog/>

My blogs:

North Korea zone: www.NKzone.org

Personal notebook: www.RConversation.com

WHAT BLOGS CAN DO FOR YOU AND YOUR ORGANIZATION THAT ORDINARY WEBSITES CAN'T:

- Handy blogging tools and blog-hosting services enable small groups (or individual activists) with little or no funding to set up a professional-looking site in under an hour without needing to pay web design or other technical professionals.
- Blog-tools enable non-technical people in your organization to update blogs – from the office, home, or field - without the help of webmasters, web-designers or other “tech” people.
- Blogs help you to build your “information community” with like-minded individuals and organizations by cross-linking to their sites.
- “Google juice:” The traffic generated by cross-linking creates much higher Google-search rankings for blogs than for all but the most popular websites.
- If you enable visitors to leave comments to your entries, blogs allow you to easily interact with the people who visit your site, enabling them to participate in a discussion about what you do, thus encouraging their participation or support for your activities.
- The easy way in which weblog content can be syndicated and read in newsreader programs (like My Yahoo! or Bloglines) enables you to get your information out there on a more equal footing than ever before.
- Password-protected blogs can be used for internal communications and knowledge management within an organization, or between funders and grantees. (More effective in some instances than email listservs.)

ELEMENTS OF A GOOD BLOG:

- **Message:** You must know what message or messages you want to communicate and why.
- **Desire and need:** You must have a desire – and the need – to do a better job at communicating. (In other words, if you are totally happy with the way in which you communicate your message to your colleagues, funders, constituencies, and the public, then there is no need to have a blog!)
- **A clear goal:** Know what you want to accomplish with your blog. It may evolve over time to accomplish things you hadn't expected, but without a clear focus at the beginning you won't develop traffic because people who visit the site will see it has no focus.
- **An audience:** This may just be your funders, your members, or the people in your immediate community – or it may be a global community of people who share concern for your issue. But you need to have some idea who you are speaking to. (If your blog is public you'll gain audience from unexpected places, but you must at least start out knowing that you have something to communicate to SOMEBODY who is interested in hearing about it.)
- **Commitment:** You need at least one person in your organization who is committed to updating the blog regularly with clear, interesting writing and useful links. The material may be pre-existing, it may or may not be a full-time job, but the blog will not succeed without somebody's committed efforts.

RESOURCE LINKS:

A CONSTANTLY-UPDATED RESOURCE PAGE: <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/xdev/cgi-bin/wiki.pl?BlogWiki> (or go to www.RConversation.com and click on the 1st link at the top right).

BASIC HOW-TO'S:

- Blogging for Nonprofits: <http://www.nonprofitquarterly.org/section/466.html>
- How to increase your blog's readership:
http://wolves.typepad.com/wolves/2004/04/getting_noticed.html

Blogging tools:

- (for a more complete list see: <http://www.lights.com/weblogs/tools.html> and <http://www.globeofblogs.com/?x=tools>)
- For a very detailed breakdown of blog tool features see:
<http://www.asymptomatic.net/blogbreakdown.htm>

Incomplete list of some popular tools:

1. Easy “Hosted” blog tools (on the blog-service provider’s server, so you don’t need to have your own server-space or know how to install programs on it).

Blogger: <http://www.blogger.com>
Typepad: <http://www.typepad.com>
Blog-City: <http://www.blog-city.com>
Blogware: <http://blog.blogware.com/blog> (via re-sellers listed on their site)

2. “Community-oriented” blogging tools:

Livejournal: <http://livejournal.com>
Xanga: <http://xanga.com>
Diaryland: <http://diaryland.com>
Journalspace: <http://journalspace.com>

3. For “Advanced users” or those who have IT professionals working with or for them:

Movable Type: <http://www.movabletype.org/>
Manila: <http://manila.userland.com>
RadioUserland: <http://radio.userland.com>
ExpressionEngine: <http://www.pmachine.com>
pMachine Free and Pro: <http://www.pmachine.com>

4. “Open-source” tools:

Bloxsom: <http://www.blosxom.com>
Wordpress: <http://wordpress.org>
Scoop: <http://scoop.kuro5hin.org/>